

Cat Flu



It is estimated that 80-90% of cats have been exposed to cat flu which causes symptoms similar to the common cold in humans. Most cats recover within 5-10 days.

- Cat flu is caused by one or more viruses – the most common are the Feline Calciivirus and the Feline herpes virus
- Cat flu can only be passed on to other cats
- Cat flu cannot be passed on to humans or other animals
- You cannot tell by looking at a cat that has had flu or is a cat flu carrier

As cat flu is caused by a virus there is no direct cure, so treatment aims to relieve symptoms until the immune system can clear it. When exposed to flu, some cats have no reaction at all but they may become carriers, and when stressed they may shed the virus and infect other cats. Cats who are exposed may show a combination of mild symptoms such as sneezing, runny eyes & nose, a congested nose, ulcers on the tongue & mouth, or they may lose their appetite & appear lethargic. These usually disappear over a few days as the immune system kicks in.

Cat flu itself is not serious. Sometimes, however, a secondary bacterial infection can develop which will need to be treated medically with antibiotics or eye ointment. If not treated these infections may become very serious.

Your cat has had the flu at SAFE. They may have arrived with symptoms or symptoms appeared a few days later. Cats with flu symptoms are housed in a separate area at SAFE until they have recovered and we do not make cats available for adoption until fully recovered.

The cat you have adopted is currently healthy with no symptoms.

However after recovering from cat flu, many cats remain life-long carriers of the virus and flu symptoms may return during stressful events such as going into a new environment or meeting new people. They may also re-occur if the immune system is weakened due to another illness. Taking your cat home will cause them to be stressed and there's a chance that minor symptoms may appear. If this is the case they need to be monitored but will usually resolve quickly.

If symptoms appear within SAFE's 14 day health guarantee period

If your cat has discharge from its eyes or nose the best thing you can do is to make them comfortable by gently bathing their eyes & nose with warm, damp cotton wool. If they don't seem interested in eating, try warming some strong smelling food to tempt them. Monitor their symptoms & if they persist or get worse over a period of 3 days please contact us for advice &/or supportive treatment. Cats sometimes react to the dust & new smells of a new environment by sneezing so please note that sneezing on its own does not indicate that a cat has flu. However if it is accompanied by discharge from the nose or eyes you need to monitor and contact us as above.

If you have other cats at home

You can't tell by looking at a cat that it has had flu. Any cat including, your own cat, could be a flu carrier, and when cats are introduced to each other there is always a small risk that flu symptoms could appear in either cat. If you follow our guide 'Settling your new cat in your home' and keep your new cat in a separate room for 7-10 days, this will minimise their stress. If any symptoms appear please follow our instructions above.

A word on vaccinations

The F3 vaccination covers the 2 most common viral strains of cat flu & it's important that your cats are up to date with vaccinations, even those who have had cat flu. Although the vaccinations will not prevent them from contracting cat flu or stop them from shedding the virus, they will reduce its severity and prevent serious illness. Even cats who have had cat flu should be vaccinated as it is still possible for them to be infected with other strains of flu.

This sheet is to be used as a general guide only and does not constitute professional or veterinary advice. SAFE Animal Rehoming does not accept responsibility for any circumstance which may arise from reliance on the information given